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Divided Identity: Part-Time Faculty in Public Colleges and Universities

John S. Levin and Virginia Montero Hernandez

The continuing and cacophonous claims about part-time faculty in higher education in the United States have detailed the conditions and plight of this population (AFT, 2009; Barker, 1998; Bousquet, 2008; Cross & Goldenberg, 2009; JBL & Associates, 2008; University and College Union, 2010). Except for part-timers who are not dependent on academic work for their livelihood, part-timers are undercompensated and ill used (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011). All part-timers are possibly maligned with claims from scholars that their effects upon students are not optimal, certainly not as beneficial as those of full-timers (Bousquet, 2008; Cross & Goldenberg, 2009; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger & Eagan, 2010; Umbach, 2007). Although scholars and practitioners may know a good deal about the working conditions and compensation of part-time faculty, with some quantitatively derived views on this population's general effects upon students, such knowledge does not explain the work of part-time faculty or the construction and meanings of their academic

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work. Current knowledge touches only the surface of the working life and professional identity of part-time faculty who constitute 45% of the total of all faculty in the United States. (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011).

PURPOSE AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This study explains the ways in which specific professional selves develop, express themselves, and understand their professional futures within the higher education ranks of part-time faculty in public colleges and universities in the United States. Specifically, this investigation examines the construction of academic identity for social science and science part-time faculty at three different institutional types: a research university, a comprehensive university, and a community college. The articulation of this academic identity is based on the narratives provided by part-time faculty members. Our analysis of these narratives, using cultural theory and identity theory, provides an explanation of part-time faculty members as an occupational community whose attributes and behaviors have previously been simplified or overlooked.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON PART-TIME FACULTY

While the main tenor of discussions on part-time faculty have looked at this population through perspectives that are largely institutional ones and thus view part-timers as a deficit population (Kezar & Sam, 2011), there is a substantial and informative body of scholarship on part-timers. A segment of this scholarship conflates part-time faculty with all nontenure-track faculty, which includes full-time, nontenure-track faculty (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011; Shaker, 2008) and refers to this population as “contingent.” This confusion exists because neither group is in the tenure stream; and without tenure, their professional status is either absent or muted (Kezar & Sam, 2011; Levin & Shaker, 2011)—that is, the legitimacy of the work of nontenure-track faculty is called into question.

Existing literature on part-time faculty contains at least four basic lines of discussion: (a) the growth of part-time faculty, including the overall merits of this population (e.g., Cross & Goldenberg, 2009), (b) descriptive information about their characteristics as well as their employment and work, including job satisfaction, organizational position, and workload (e.g., Cataldi, Fahimi, & Bradburn, 2005), (c) the deleterious effects of large percentages of part-time faculty in colleges and universities (e.g., American Association of University Professors, 2009), and (d) categories of groups or types within the part-time population (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Levin, Kater, & Wagoner, 2011). What the literature does not convey, at least in depth, are the professional behaviors

and experiences of part-time faculty, including their self-representations and the manner in which they understand their professional status.

Growth of Part-Time Faculty

The growing dependency on part-time faculty in U.S. higher education has resulted from numerous external and internal factors. Economic strains are the basis for some of these factors. For example, postsecondary institutions face reduced public and private funding while their operating costs continue to increase (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Bland et al., 2006; Liu & Zhang, 2007). At the same time, public demand for postsecondary education has continued to grow. As financial tensions continue to rise and greater numbers of diverse students demand access, public confidence in higher education and its tenure system has decreased, further complicating postsecondary faculty hiring decisions that favor full-time tenure track faculty (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). This loss of public confidence has given rise to increased demand for institutional accountability and transparency (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Furthermore, scholars link the financial needs of and diminution of public support for higher education to shifting marketization techniques and academic capitalism (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Levin, 2007; Rhoades, 1998; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Slaughter & Leslie, 1999). In addition, the increasing average age of tenured faculty, and the removal of a mandatory retirement age in the United States in 1994, has made it more difficult to anticipate and prepare for the hiring of new faculty members (O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). The employment of part-time faculty allows postsecondary institutions to assuage many of these pressures.

There are several justifications for and benefits arising from the employment of part-time faculty (Jacobs, 1998; Rhoades, 1996, 1998). First, it enables postsecondary institutions to accommodate the growing population of students who seek a postsecondary education. Second, it lowers expenses related to faculty salary and benefits while accommodating more students, which, in turn, increases revenue in the form of student tuition. Monks (2007) found that part-time faculty, on average, earned 64% less per hour at their institutions than full-time faculty. Third, the use of part-time faculty provides a buffer that allows institutions to respond quickly to public demands and economic cycles while protecting the norms of academic freedom enjoyed by tenured faculty. Fourth, non-academic careers of part-time faculty provide unique benefits to postsecondary education programs, including professional experience in their field (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Wallin, 2004). Fifth, and finally, given public distrust in postsecondary education, O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008) note a "growing belief that faculty in non-tenure-track positions may be more easily held accountable

to institutional and societal goals than can faculty in tenured positions” (p. 62). In other words, part-time faculty, as well as full-time nontenure track faculty (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Levin & Shaker, 2011), may be more responsive than their full-time tenured and tenure-track counterparts because they often lack the protection of tenure and need to be more adaptive to ensure renewed employment.

Who Are Part-Timers?

A second dominant topic covered in the scholarly literature addresses who these faculty members are quantitatively—their demographic characteristics and employment status, including compensation. According to the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), the majority of part-time faculty members, as is the case with full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty and nontenure track faculty, are male and white. However, the demographic distribution across part-time faculty members differs from that of full-timers in important ways. For example, the ratio of male to female part-time faculty members is close to equal, with males comprising 52.9% of this group compared to 61.9% of full-time faculty. In contrast, a higher proportion of part-time than full-time faculty is White, 85.3% and 80.8% respectively.

A study commissioned by the American Federation of Teachers found the ages of part-time faculty evenly distributed: 33% are ages 18 to 44, 31% are ages 45 to 54, and 36% are 55 and over (Hart Research Associates, 2010). This finding is fairly consistent with Monks’s (2009) calculation, based on the 2004 NSOPF, that the average age of part-time faculty is 48, the same as that of full-time faculty.

Nevertheless, part-time and full-time differ considerably in their highest educational degree attained. Among part-time instructional faculty and staff, 25.3% held doctoral or first-professional degrees, with 53.2% holding master’s degrees and 21.5% holding a bachelor’s or less (Cataldi, Fahimi, & Bradburn, 2005). By contrast, the majority of their full-time counterparts, 67.9%, held doctoral or first-professional degrees.

Several structural aspects indicate the unique position of part-time faculty in postsecondary education. The overwhelming majority of part-time faculty appointments (and those who are the subject of this investigation) are not eligible for tenure. According to the 2004 NSOPF, only 4.2% of all instructional part-time postsecondary faculty held tenured or tenure-track status while 70.6% of their full-time counterparts held the same status (Cataldi, Fahimi, & Bradburn, 2005). Although not as wide a difference, 17% of part-time faculty, as compared to over 24% of full-time faculty, report belonging to a union or similar bargaining association (Monks, 2009).

These differences between full-timers and part-timers are reflected in the comparatively lower pay and benefits received by part-time faculty. Since

part-timers are often paid relative to the number of credit hours and courses taught, their average basic institutional income in 2003 was \$11,160, almost \$44,000 less than the average income of full-timers (Monks, 2009). Even inclusive of total individual or household incomes, part-timers averaged at least \$20,000 less than full-time faculty members. They also tend to have less access to resources, such as office space and technology (Gappa & Leslie, 1993; Jacobs, 1998). On average, part-time faculty receive no health insurance as a part of their contracts, and they are not accorded retirement benefits (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). The significantly lower salaries and lack of benefits are compounded by the tenuous nature of their employment contracts.

By almost all measures—salary, benefits, employment status—part-timers are at the bottom of the higher education faculty hierarchy (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011). Yet within this population, there are differences between groups of part-timers. Part-time faculty from technical and vocational fields appear to fit the traditional definition of part-time faculty as they earn the largest portion of their income from employment outside of academe.

The structural conditions for those part-time faculty who depend on their university or college for their livelihood may indeed contribute to the expressed marginalization of part-time faculty at institutions, hindering their ability to develop a sense of institutional belonging, and suggest why these quantitative measures are prevalent in the research literature (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011).

Deleterious Effects of Part-Time Faculty

In spite of the initial economic savings and the contributions that part-time faculty offer postsecondary institutions, scholars caution against the overuse of this growing faculty workforce (Benjamin, 2003). For example, studies suggest that the use of part-time faculty has a negative effect on various measures of student achievement, such as graduation (Ehrenberg & Zhang, 2005) and transfer rates from community colleges to universities (Eagan & Jaeger, 2009). Other scholars have pointed out differences in the activity level of part-time and full-time tenured and tenure track faculty in the areas of teaching, research/professional development, and service/administration (Benjamin, 2003; Leslie & Gappa, 2002; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Umbach, 2007; Warrick, 2008). One scholar found that part-time faculty appear to “interact with students less frequently, use active and collaborative techniques less often, spend less time preparing for class, and have lower academic expectations” (Umbach, 2007, p. 110) than full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty. Furthermore, the lower activity level of part-time faculty has been attributed to lower levels of satisfaction, isolation from the traditional professional community (i.e., tenure system), and/or the differentiated roles part-time faculty often fulfill (O’Meara,

Terosky, & Neumann, 2008). Generally, the recent literature on part-time faculty has focused on the unintended consequences of employing a large contingent faculty workforce.

The use of part-time faculty allows institutions to meet multiple demands and improve institutional efficiency. This efficiency, however, may come at a cost as scholars suggest that too much reliance on part-time faculty can have a negative influence on instructional quality and institutional productivity. This is not to suggest, however, that part-timers are responsible for the many ills attributed to higher education, such as student learning outcomes.

Categories of Part-Timers

One of the earlier—yet among the most cited—categorization systems for part-time faculty comes from Gappa and Leslie (1993). They present a loose and metaphorical categorization of part-time faculty, which characterizes difference among part-time faculty members, including their circumstances: “career enders,” “specialists/experts/professionals,” “aspiring academics,” and “freelancers.” Banachowski (1996) provides a slightly updated version of categories, addressing the unpalatable condition of part-timers, which includes “the academic underclass,” “gypsy scholars,” “anchorless street-corner men,” “invisible and expendable,” and an “exploitation of the worst kind” (pp. 2–3). Levin, Shaker, and Wagoner (2011) offer a parsimonious and dichotomous categorization: “part-time faculty as highly skilled and trained assets and part-time faculty as a less-skilled means to achieve efficiency, flexibility, and control” (p. 83). Another categorization approach relies upon the motivation of the part-timers themselves, largely gleaned by scholars through survey research. The result is another dichotomous finding, stemming from the ambitions of individual part-timers. Among these is categorization based upon employment preferences or, more pointedly, whether part-timers aspire to full-time status. In the early 1990s, this proportion was estimated at 16.6% of part-timers (Gappa & Leslie, 1993). By 2004, this percentage grew to 35% (Monks, 2009).

What these categorization systems or labeling approaches reflect are aspects of working conditions and labor force characteristics in the domain of higher education. They are useful in contextualizing work satisfaction, in characterizing individuals or groups within the academic workforce, and in pointing out the conditions of one group in comparison to others—for example, “economic expedients” and those with “highly valued expertise” (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011, p. 97). What such categorizations do not address are the professional identity of part-time faculty on university and college campuses and the self-representations of this population as faculty: that is, the construction of the professional self.

The perceptions of part-time faculty themselves on their effectiveness and the quality of their work suggest two points of view related to the movement

from the values of academic culture that drive decisions to employ and retain part-time faculty to the values of managerialism, both of which are conditional upon assumed social, political, and economic contexts (Levin, Shaker, & Wagoner, 2011). In a study of California part-timers from 1980, Abel (1984) found that many part-timers blamed themselves for their inability to obtain a full-time position. By the mid-1990s, however, part-timers no longer attributed their lack of a full-time, tenured position to self-failings. Instead, they viewed professional managers as responsible (Barker, 1998). In this form of managerialism (Deem, 1998), employment control is located within the administration and is shaped by a business model of employee relations, with a privileged class of tenured and tenure-track faculty and a subordinate class of part-time faculty. Barker (1998) terms this system "layered citizenship" (p. 199).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: CULTURE AND IDENTITY

We use both cultural theory and professional identity theory to interpret the ways in which professional selves are constructed within a specific socio-cultural context. The construction of identity in the workplace involves a series of strategies and mechanisms through which individuals develop forms of self-understanding and self-definition as members of an occupational or professional group (Kleinman, 1981; McKeon, Gillham, & Bersani, 1981; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). As described by identity theorists, the construction of an occupational or professional identity is a fluid and negotiated process through which individuals develop multiple narratives that describe their role functions and respond to the challenges and demands of their workplace (Assaf, 2008; Fine, 1996; McKeon, Gillham, & Bersani, 1981; Volkmann & Anderson, 1998).

The construction of a professional identity involves the development of self-definitions and strategies of action within a professional discourse (Kleinman, 1981; McKeon, Gillham, & Bersani, 1981; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Identity formation is a context-driven process (Côté & Levine, 2002; Greenhalgh, 2002; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), and the organizational context where professionals' work provides cultural and social resources for individuals to make sense of themselves and their practices (Abbas & McLean, 2001; Assaf, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Ibarra, 1999). To explain the influence of the socio-cultural context in the formation of individuals' self-definitions, cultural theorists suggest that the authoring of identity is based on two features: "figured worlds" and "the positional aspect of identity" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). A figured world is a "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance

is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53). The positional aspect of identity refers to “one’s position relative to socially identified others, one’s sense of social place, and entitlement” (p. 125). Positional identity is associated with the forms of interaction in which individuals engage.

Through “self-authoring” of the professional self, faculty represent their “agency.” Agency, which refers to individuals’ capacity to act upon their world and formulate projects and develop different ways of being (Holland et al. 1998; Ortner, 2006), contributes to the construction of identity. Holland et al. (1998) suggest that “identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they developed in social practice” (p. 5). The agentic individual is an “actor engaged in a project, a game, and drama, an actor with not just a ‘point of view’ but a more active projection of the self toward some desired end” (Ortner, 1997, p. 146). We use the concept of agency to explain how faculty use their linguistic resources to build, re-configure, and adapt their self-understandings and self-definitions on the basis of the specific contextual demands they experience in their everyday work activities at colleges or universities. As an element of one’s subjectivity, agency plays a critical role in the ways in which individuals select and integrate cultural resources to make sense of who they are (Ortner, 2006; Swidler, 2001). Agency is linked to individuals’ capacity to produce different types of narratives to make sense of and represent themselves according to the practices and interactions that they experience within a specific place and time (Bradbury & Miller, 2010; Vodde & Gallant, 2002).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Through an interpretative approach (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), this investigation aimed to understand the ways in which part-time faculty members construct meaning for their professional activities on the basis of their self-perceptions within three different higher education institutions. The work context of the participants in our sample was the state of California, one of the largest higher education systems in the United States. Each the three separate publicly funded higher education subsystems—University of California (UC), California State University (CSU), and California Community Colleges (CACC)— is governed by its own board of trustees and is subject to different state laws (Callan, 2009).

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002; Hester & Francis, 1994; Opie, 2004; Pawson, 1996) to capture part-time faculty’s self-understandings in their employment context. We examined 14 part-time faculty members’ narratives drawn from a larger set of 60 interview transcripts of both full-time and part-time faculty at three institutions from

TABLE 1
PART-TIME FACULTY PARTICIPANTS

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Dept/Area</i>	<i>Occupational Goals</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Larry	M	Psych/social science	Part-time (has other full-time job)	CSU
Sally	F	Psych/social science	Full-time position	CSU
Susan	F	Psych/social science	PT teaching; PT school psych; PT mother	CSU
Dorothy	F	Psych/social science	FT aspirations but resigned to PT	CSU
Laura	F	Psych/social science	Full-time job at private university recently obtained	CSU
Cindy	F	Bio/science	Full-time university or community college	CSU
Kathy	F	Psych/social science	Part-time, to support spouse and children	CSU
Randall	M	Chem/science	Part-time (retired from FT job)	UC
Winston	M	Chem/science	Part-time (retired from FT job)	UC
Chris	M	Soc/Social science	Part-time	CACC
Stuart	M	Bio/science	Part-time (retired from FT job)	CACC
Paul	M	Soc/social science	Full-time college administrator	CACC
James	M	Crim/social science	Part-time— retired from former job	CACC
Barbara	F	Bio/science	Full-time faculty at community college	CACC

a larger investigation. We drew participants, who volunteered, from social sciences and science departments—psychology, sociology, biology, and chemistry—and engaged faculty in lengthy discussions lasting between one and a half and two hours. The interview protocol was intended to draw out the faculty through leading questions and subsequent prompts based on the narrative episodes communicated by participants (Seidman, 2006). (Table 1 describes our participants and their employment status and aspirations.)

To understand the speaker's professional self and to capture narratives in which Holland et al.'s categories would provide an analytical framework, it was necessary that these faculty construct their own story on the basis of the specific topics that the interviewer provided. In these conversations, interviewer and interviewee covered topics of teaching, organizational context, work with students, relationships with other part-time and full-time faculty, academic and employment backgrounds, professional projects, participation in institutional decision-making, and anticipated future employment, as well as professional achievements and sources of satisfaction and stress. Our purpose was to investigate matters of personal and professional import for these faculty while being mindful of the ethical responsibility of protecting our participants and cognizant of their vulnerabilities (Mason, 2002).

Consistent with the research approvals received from our institution, from the three distinct institutions we investigated, and from the faculty members we interviewed for this investigation, we do not disclose the names of institutions or individuals. We also mask their specific disciplines by generalizing their areas as either "social sciences" or "science," use generic names for our three California higher education institutions, and identify participants by pseudonyms.

Because this investigation relies upon self-representation, indeed to some extent upon the self-presentation of participants (Goffman, 1959) as faculty in higher education, we captured an interaction between interviewer and part-time faculty member. Thus, member checking was not necessary to validate data. While we offered participants the findings of the investigation for their edification, we chose other means of ascertaining the trustworthiness of our analysis and findings. First, we used three researchers on the project: a post-doctoral fellow, a graduate student, and a tenured faculty member. These three debriefed following interviews. We also undertook three separate efforts of preliminary data analysis using preliminary coding with each of the three researchers assigned to a single institutional type. Then, after one of the researchers combined the separate sets of analyzed data and did a narrative analysis of the data set, a second researcher reviewed the analysis and provided modifications.

The preliminary analysis was important in identifying emergent topics, patterns, and linkages in data and enabled the identification of similarities

and differences in participants' narratives. The following stage of narrative analysis allowed us to conduct a thorough examination of the ways in which participants represent themselves within the narrated accounts of their practice. Narrative analysis addresses the stories constructed by individuals—stories that explain experiences and present-day conditions. In the performance of the stories, in their telling, the actors construct and project their identities (Riessman, 2002). We used Riessman's (2000, 2002) explanation of one tradition of narrative analysis, based upon extended interviews and featuring detailed, verbatim transcripts, care for structural features of discourse, attention to narrative created by the interviewer and participant, and a comparative approach. This narrative analysis identified both individual and collective actions and the meanings of those actions (Laslett, 1999), pointing us toward an understanding of the professional or occupational identity of this group.

We read interview transcripts to select specific narratives in which faculty members talked about critical work experiences and elements of their practice that allowed them to reflect on their actions, decisions, and position within their departments and the larger institutional context. Identity theory suggests that the construction of individuals' self-definition is mediated by the socio-cultural context that they navigate (Côté & Levine, 2002; Erez & Earley, 1993). Therefore, in our data analysis, we paid attention to the ways in which faculty members talked about the institutional context in which they constructed and assessed their everyday relationships, performance, and career expectations. We examined part-time faculty members' participation in socially produced, culturally constructed activities (i.e., figured worlds) within their specific employment context (Holland et al., 1998). Additionally, we examined the specific places that part-time faculty members occupy in the social structure (i.e., positionality) and how their specific position influenced their self-definitions. We created categories of analysis that explained the ways in which the conditions of power, subordination, and privilege that faculty found through the enactment of their professional duties in the workplace allowed them to construct a specific type of status, their role, and their forms of action and interaction with colleagues and students. Our main goal in the final stage of analysis was to create a story of events that allowed us to understand and then explain the ways in which individuals make sense of themselves and their work (Levin & Shaker, 2011). We use the concept of "self-authoring" (Holland et al., 1998) to frame the ways in which members of our population define and explain themselves within the context of their figured, institutional environment.

From coding to categorization to integration, we used several techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to generate observations, which ultimately led to findings. These techniques included clustering, making met-

aphors, making comparisons and contrasts, locating intervening variables, and finally making conceptual coherence. We synthesized our observations of individual participant texts to lead us to findings about the group as a whole. Our conclusions address the population of part-time faculty as a whole—as a class or group of faculty. We then relate these conclusions to theory and the expansion of theory relevant to professional identity of part-time faculty.

FINDINGS

The sections we present below show the conditions in which part-time faculty constructed a divided sense of their identity as professionals. To talk about themselves and their work activities, participants identified two main figured worlds: the classroom and the department. Their position in each of these socially and culturally constructed figured worlds allowed them to perceive different opportunities for human agency, social acknowledgment, and group membership. First, we discuss the ways in which part-timers made sense of their positions and opportunities for self-authoring in the classroom; then we discuss the department and the larger organizational context as the second figured world in which part-timers shape their self-definition and enact their work practice. The quotations from the interviews are representative examples of the narratives we found across the 14 cases.

All part-time faculty members regardless of their institutional affiliation noted that being a part-timer had both disadvantages and advantages. The specific ways in which they talked about those pros and cons to shape their self-understandings and the perception of their practice varied depending on their particular position and personal stories.

We use the notion of profession as a construct to organize our inferences and make sense of the ways in which participants talked about themselves as professionals. A profession is a regulated enterprise that, according to scholars, exhibits eight characteristics (Abbott, 1988; Brint, 1994; Buchanan, 1983; Carr, 2000). First is the possession of a body of knowledge that is not accessible to everyone and whose content over time is expected to be expanded. Second, professions are based on a sense of calling and a service orientation that responds to the centrality of the functions of the profession to those outside the profession. Third, a professional is required to apply a body of knowledge to a specific context to obtain a predictable outcome or resolution for individuals over the short term. Fourth, professionals engage in formal training for an extended period of time leading to a degree that acknowledges expertise in a particular field of knowledge. Fifth, the making of a profession involves the development of a collective consciousness which is maintained through the creation of professional associations aimed to promote the communication of the knowledge and culture of the group

among the members and regulate the size of the group through controlled admissions. Sixth, professionals require continual updating of their qualifications and knowledge to provide services. Seventh, professional practices are measurable against defined codes of ethics of conduct or principles of procedure. Eighth and finally, by virtue of their expertise, members of a profession are permitted to operate independently, make decisions, exercise discretion, and be free of direct supervision.

Figured Worlds: The Classroom and the Department as Places for Self-Authoring

We invited our volunteer interviewees to articulate their perceptions of identity in the context of three different higher education institutions—a research university, a comprehensive university, and a community college. These settings are specific and different social-cultural environments, including structures, norms, and practices. Yet we found that the self-represented identities of part-time faculty were not dramatically dissimilar depending on the setting. Participants acknowledged the goals that their university or college embraced, and they viewed themselves as aligned to that mission. For Susan, at CSU, “our goal is that students become critical thinkers,” a generalization she makes about all of the faculty in her department. Randall at UC recognizes that “it is the research that counts” at his institution. For Chris at CACC, the traditional mission of educating citizens has given way to the “the expanded educational mission—you know, the online environment, and international accessible global learning areas, and virtual reality.” Paul elaborates on the community college mission: “the idea of promoting and seeking to continue learning, [to] be a lifelong learner, to give back to the community.” These faculty were convinced that, through their instructional work, they contributed to an educated citizenry and allowed full-time faculty members to focus on research or carry out other institutional duties.

Part-time faculty members navigated their figured worlds, which they inhabit as sites for their identities (Holland et al., 1998), through the actions they undertook and the interpretation of the interactions they constructed. In the main, the figured worlds of part-time faculty in the three institutions were their departments and classrooms (i.e., their teaching environments), with one world outside of their control and the other under their control. They relate to these worlds as teachers of college and university students, largely at the freshman and sophomore levels.

The personal stories and conditions among participants influenced the ways in which they both constructed and perceived their position in their two figured worlds. We identified two subgroups of part-timers on the basis of the level of satisfaction from their participation in their figured worlds. One group of part-timers (those with full-time aspirations) characterized their position as problematical; and the second group (those who had retired

from a full-time job, those who possessed a full-time job elsewhere, those who adhered to an ideological stance that opposed full-time academic employment, and those who saw domestic responsibilities as equally important to academic employment) characterized their position as consonant with their needs and interests.

Stuart, retired from a full-time job at his community college, had returned a year later as a part-timer: “[The department] needed some part-time help . . . [s]o I filled in some classes. . . . I’m happy to do that.” His work matches his interests and choices: “I’ll probably just teach here some part time, continue to go sailing and surfing, and just enjoy learning new things, watching my son and his wife make a child here and get some grandchildren.”

As part-timers’ figured worlds emerge through their narratives of experience, so too does their perspective on their position inside that world (Holland et al., 1998). When part-time faculty members thought of their position as instructors in the classroom, their self-definition as professionals contained positive attributes. They described themselves as effective and specialized workers. Sally in social sciences at CSU conveys her attachment to teaching as a love relationship. She perceived herself as an effective instructor who is committed to her classroom practice:

Everything about teaching is satisfying. I love the prep work. I love writing lecture notes. . . . I’m very good at it, and I really enjoy it. . . . [I] like to review textbooks. I like writing the syllabus. I like the idea of kind of sculpting the class. And then as far as teaching goes, I love teaching. I walk into a classroom, and I’m on stage. It’s my domain, and I feel alive and very energetic when I’m teaching. . . . [I] love sharing knowledge that they might not have.

When part-timers thought of their position in the department and the larger institutional context, their view of their status diminished, due to a lack of institutional acknowledgement and social value. As members of a department, they perceived a separation between full-time tenured and tenure-track and part-time faculty. Additionally, part-timers’ lack of participation in the definition of departmental and institutional life reinforced a sense of exclusion. Although Cindy in social sciences at CSU has worked in the institution and department for a number of years, she says, “I don’t know that much about what’s going on with the department.” Susan, also in social sciences at CSU, talks about a divide in the department between full-time tenure-track faculty and part-time faculty: “I tend to think there’s a divide. I think some [full-time] faculty members . . . want it that way.”

Self-Authoring the Professional in the Classroom: Knowledge, Preparation, and Good Teaching

Participation in instructional practice was a source of self-value and self-efficacy among part-timers. All participants noted that teaching was a

professional activity that demanded specialized knowledge about the subject matter and a teaching style that allowed them to connect with students and to create meaningful learning experiences with them. Through their teaching, part-time faculty at the three institutions authored themselves as professionals, that is, as relatively autonomous. Sally at CSU explains:

We choose the textbook. We decide how many tests, quizzes, papers, what projects they do, if any. There are [part-timers] who do not give any papers at all, who do only tests. There are [part-timers] who don't do any tests at all, who do only papers. We decide if we're going to grade on attendance. We decide if we're going to grade on participation. We decide every single thing about it. It's entirely autonomous.

Although all faculty members acknowledged that graduate schools do not always provide extensive training in teaching, they used their experiences as teaching assistants and their self-directed education in their disciplinary field as sources of learning to enact their instructional work. They viewed themselves in the classroom setting as devoted professionals who acted to support the institutional mission. Their sense of professionalism came from their training (90% of the sample held PhDs), their specialized knowledge in either the social or natural sciences, their commitment to prepare their instructional work, and their efforts to create a personal teaching approach that allowed them to connect to students effectively.

Dorothy's self-perception as a part-time faculty member for 26 years in a social science department at CSU, where she was also a student, is constructed on the basis of two conditions: self-worth and institutional exclusion. Although she holds a doctoral degree, research is not a career goal for her. She devotes her energies to teaching and mentoring students. In spite of her long-time employment at CSU, she expresses feelings of being undervalued in the department and sees herself as separated from full-time faculty members in her department. Her sense of connection to the institution comes from her work with students; she expresses a high level of satisfaction with her teaching performance. She emphasizes that one of the most relevant features of her activities that qualifies her to work with students is her specialized knowledge:

[The most important characteristic of my job as an instructor is] . . . being knowledgeable of the topic at hand. . . . One of the things that I'm doing this term is teaching an advanced seminar. . . . They are senior students. For a lot of them it's their last class . . . so definitely to be as knowledgeable of the particular topics as the full-time professor who's also doing research on the topic, [I need] to be aware of the . . . research that's coming out. . . . Students aren't going to benefit if I'm teaching them from what I learned in 1980.

To be knowledgeable in a specific disciplinary field was a feature of part-time faculty members' self-perception that allowed them to consider

themselves as professionals who were as equally valuable as full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members. Part-time faculty emphasized that the characteristics of their work with students was as challenging and complex as that undertaken by full-time faculty members. Laura, from the same department at the comprehensive university as Dorothy, viewed herself as a legitimate professional, based on not only her doctoral training and interest in research but also on her effectiveness as an instructor and her personal initiative in undertaking research projects outside the university. Similar to other part-time faculty, Laura represented the professional dimension of her work as based on both instruction and research. Therefore, her status as part-time faculty, which focused on teaching, was a condition that she wanted to change to fulfill her professional expectations and plans:

Being an effective teacher would be one of the top characteristics [that] defines me as a faculty member here. Whereas from a professional standpoint, I see the research as part of who I am . . . [I] don't see my teaching work as different from the work that full-time faculty members do. Given my situation, I definitely don't work part-time. The only distinction I could possibly see is that they're doing their teaching amidst research and service. But I'm doing my teaching amongst research as well as amongst teaching in other places as well. . . . We all work hard. But there is a perception that we work less. . . . [The evaluation of my teaching] validates me in my profession.

Laura's self-confidence motivated her to keep looking for full-time faculty positions, and she had recently secured a full-time tenure-track job at a private doctoral university where she would take on an additional formal role as a researcher as well as a teacher.

In the community college context, part-time faculty also viewed teaching as a professional practice due to the specialized knowledge that instructors had to possess in order to help students make sense of what they were learning. Paul is a part-timer in a community college; his narrative is a representative example of the tension that part-time faculty members experience in their professional work. On the one hand, Paul views his teaching as a component of his job that enables him to identify as a professional. On the other hand, his detachment from the organizational and departmental dynamics at his college diminishes his self-projected professional status:

The things that make my work high quality [are] maybe keeping up to date in the material, making sure I'm using legitimate readers and readings and textbooks, making sure that I'm keeping the integrity of the discipline. . . . That's what makes it professional I think. . . . When somebody asks me what I do, I just say I'm an educator. . . . At the same time, they go, "Oh, so you're a professor at . . ." And I say, "Well, I'm an adjunct." . . . I'm not doing any of the other part that full-time members would be doing. And I think that, had I been involved in some of these activities and helping the institution prepare

and perform and develop, then I could probably consider myself more of a professional than I do now.

The autonomy that part-timers enjoyed as part of their construction of their instructional activities and relationships with students in classrooms was an element of part-time faculty members' figured worlds that fostered a sense of professionalism in their self-perceptions. However, when faculty members thought of their figured worlds outside of the classroom and their positionality, they found themselves in an undervalued, subordinated, and isolated—even alienated—position within the whole organizational structure of their institution.

Self-Authoring the Non-Professional in the Organizational Context: Institutional Detachment and Isolated Work

Part-time faculty members viewed themselves simultaneously as professionals and lacking professional status. Teaching in the classroom and having a positive influence on student learning were critical aspects of their job that led to their self-representation as professionals who possessed expertise in a specialized field. However, when part-time faculty viewed themselves outside the classroom and positioned themselves as members of a college or university community, their narratives about themselves, or their self-authoring, changed. Their confidence about their professional value diminished. For the part-timers at the comprehensive university and community college, the sense of exclusion or indifference that the institution exerted on them had a negative influence on the ways in which they perceived themselves as professionals. Laura describes herself as a member of an out-group at CSU—that is, as “adjunct faculty.” Since she has now secured a full-time tenure-track job, she expects to eradicate the feelings of exclusion she experienced as a part-timer. Yet she speaks of herself, even on the verge of leaving her present role, as deeply enmeshed in the conditions of part-timers:

We [part-timers] have a sense of belonging in the sense of being in the out-group, which ties us together. . . . With other adjunct faculty, I think we have a nice solid relationship. . . . Sharing an office helps with that, so we can get to know each other a little bit and vent, and we're all in the same boat in many respects. So with the other adjunct faculty, we have a close relationship.

Her burden is that she is currently teaching seven courses at three institutions, is married, and has two children. Time is thus her enemy. Work serves as an oppositional activity to her role as mother, as well as a punishment to her husband. She harbors feelings of resentment against the institution and faculty for placing her in a subservient role as a part-time faculty member:

I mean, the time factor is what weighs down on me. I guess having to work multiple places, getting paid much less for the job that you do, I feel taken

advantage of in some respects. I have the same credentials as many people who sit on the other side, yet colleges . . . , in the interest of saving money, will not hire a tenure track. They will hire an adjunct, and it's cheap labor, I feel, to some degree. And so I feel taken advantage of in that respect. And that has more recently impacted my job satisfaction.

The sense of exclusion that part-time faculty experienced was connected to their lack of participation in institutional service activities through which they could learn about the institution, their program, and academic practice. Paul at CACC noted that the role of a professional included the opportunity to participate in the construction of college life and the decision-making process. He indicates that having a physical space in the college would be a symbol of institutional acknowledgement and recognition of his contribution to the college mission; however, because he is a part-timer, the college does not extend that symbolic recognition to him:

In a lot of ways I kind of feel like a substitute teacher: you get in the classes and you're just kind of filling in the spots that the full-time faculty members can't do. And so that's how I see myself. Now, if I had an office, and I got my plaques on the wall, now I'm going to feel a little different. . . . In other words, how could I make the position that I have now feel like a professional position? Maybe having a spot on campus, actually having a legitimate place, not a shared space in some workroom, or maybe more contact with colleagues, more recognition from the institution.

Part-time faculty members experienced diminished professional status due to their lack of interaction with other faculty members and their limited opportunities to participate in faculty meetings and other decision-making processes aimed to plan academic activities in the department. Laura recounts an experience of being excluded even while she was attending a department meeting:

I did receive [the award for effective teaching]. To get it, you have to go to the departmental meeting. And when you walk in to the departmental meeting, there is this feel of, "What are you doing here?" because we're not normally invited to the departmental meeting. So it was one of the most uncomfortable situations to go and receive that award. And I've often thought that if I received it again, that I might not go to receive it because of that weird feel. So I definitely think the award is good in that they're at least acknowledging something. . . . But it's just an odd award—[an] odd process to receive it—in that you're at a meeting where you don't feel you belong.

Part-time faculty constructed their everyday work experiences as a series of practices that were necessary for the institution. Yet the institution did not allocate symbolic, physical, or financial capital to acknowledge the relevance

and complexity of their instructional practices and additional activities in which they engaged.

Self-Authoring Exclusion as Privilege

Several faculty members reported a sense of exclusion and institutional detachment but without resentment; therefore, their self-perceptions about their professional value were not diminished. This experience was the case for the two part-time faculty members at the research university who had already retired after working as a full-time faculty member (Randall) or as a full-time worker in industry (Winston); for three part-time faculty at the community college, one of whom deliberately eschewed a full-time position (Chris) and the other two of whom who had retired from full-time positions, one at the college (Stuart) and one in law enforcement (James); and for one part-timer at CSU who chose part-time work deliberately in light of her husband's full-time employment and her child-rearing preferences (Kathy). The formerly retired faculty members decided to engage in teaching as a personal strategy to preserve their connection to the university or college and to keep their mind focused on academic matters.

Among retired UC professors, the role of a part-time faculty member was an opportunity to enjoy their instructional practice without the stress of attending to other academic functions such as service or grant writing. Randall, science lecturer at UC, had a long history as a full-time tenured professor at the university. After he retired in the early 2000s, he continued teaching part-time. He has no formal relationship to his departmental full-time colleagues; he is separated from committee work and research; and his primary function is teaching undergraduate (primarily freshman) science:

[Coming back as a part-timer faculty] has been no problem for me. I don't get any mail anymore. I don't go to any meetings anymore. . . . It's just all me and all of my class. Nobody bothers me. It's a lot more relaxed. . . . Adjunct faculty don't have much say in anything. In a way it's good because they don't have to go to all these meetings and so on. That's the good part. But on the other hand, they get stuck with the decision.

In this domain, unlike his full-time colleagues, coupled with his release from committee work and the pressures of research, Randall is entirely self-directed. His relationships to his university and to his department, however, are consistent with those of other part-timers. For them, as for Randall, they have no say in department business, and are not compelled to participate in department business, but they are affected by department decisions. Winston, science lecturer at UC, left tenured positions to work for the federal government. After a career in that field, he resigned for health reasons. He can thus be categorized as a voluntary part-timer who chooses the position for the personal rewards he gains from teaching. He also conducts research at another

university (private, religiously affiliated) because of the pleasure he receives from research. He accepts his position and status without disappointment or concern in that he understands its function within the university and the reasons why he is needed for the position:

I recognize where I fit in the scheme, and I recognize that where I sit in the scheme is my choice, and therefore I should not take umbrage if it doesn't work. It doesn't mean I don't gripe occasionally. . . . I'm not actively involved in the departmental politics. But when the department is involved in science one, then they ask me for my opinions on those things. And otherwise, quite frankly, I don't want to be involved. If I did . . . I'd have applied for the position, not where I'm at.

Winston describes his work from a science teacher's point of view, his present research project, and his past career as both a tenured professor at another university and as a government employee. He portrays himself as a confident professional who uses research as a source of learning to enrich his instructional practice. His instructional role is an opportunity to teach critical thinking and strengthen students' problem solving abilities.

For those not previously retired, such as Chris and Kathy, the choice of a part-time role, while complex, does relieve them of a condition where "things happen to them." Chris describes his occupational status as a self-selected condition that allows him to preserve his ideological principles and life goals. He defines himself as a reformer who views education as an approach to fight alienated states of mind. He chooses to be a part-timer and, hence, to be a marginal participant in official institutional discourses, which he does not entirely support.

Being a part-time faculty rather than living here as a full-timer has made it easier for me to maintain a separate identity from the institution. . . . People get rewarded for their institutional identity to a point that they're not interested in questioning it. . . . [I] sort of try to step out of the whole academic identity thing and see that whole thing as possibly part of the pathology that I want to address. I try to play the biggest game I can think of. The way to do that is to just find a place to have some social marginality. The adjunct faculty status is that place; it's a good cover.

To Chris, a social science instructor at the community college, the marginalization that part-time faculty members experience is a position that allows them to question long-established educational and institutional discourses.

For part-timers who have chosen their role deliberately, this self-selected exclusion has two values. It brings with it a form of marginal professional identity, resulting from the institution's lack of acknowledgment about their value as faculty members. But second, it is also a privileged position. They occupy a position that makes few or no demands upon them outside of what

they willingly choose for themselves, unlike their part-time colleagues who aspire to full-time status.

CONCLUSIONS

The nature of part-time faculty work and employment status, as well as these faculty members' institutional roles, suggests that the construction of a professional identity among the members of this occupational group occurs in a conflicted context that both allocates and denies value to the functions that they perform. Through their narratives about their work with students in classroom, part-time faculty members authored themselves as committed professionals who constructed their practice according to the outcomes of the ways in which they negotiated their position within two figured worlds. In their instructional assignments in classrooms, part-time faculty members viewed their position as experts in the translation of specialized disciplinary content into less complex content that made sense to students. Outside the classroom, when part-time faculty members reflected on their position within the larger institutional and social context, they viewed themselves as both undervalued and sometimes even abused by their working conditions: low salaries, extended periods of work, excessive workloads, no physical space allocated to them on campus, and limited or nonexistent participation in departmental and institutional matters.

Part-time faculty members' narratives about who they are within the college or the university reflect, in spite of the institutional disadvantages, the possibilities of self-authoring. Through their stories and personal accounts, part-timers represent themselves as individuals with agency—individuals who can take action within a given context (Archer, 2000). Part-time faculty members express their agency through the construction of views and judgments about themselves as well as through actions that are self-directed, independent, and personally meaningful (Inden, 1990).

In our research, we found four forms in which part-time faculty expressed agency and developed self-definitions. These include agency framed by an imagined future; agency framed by the experiences of the past; agency based on personal conviction or self-definitions; and agency based upon the activity and responsibilities of teaching. Those who aspire to a full-time position understand the present within the context of the future. They have agency in their imagination, based on what they see themselves doing in the future, once they acquire a full-time position. In the second form of agency, Winston, Randall, Stuart, and James, who have retired from a full-time position, make sense of their position in the present from the past and view their current work and employment status as a fully personal choice—a choice derived from their past experiences. This experience enables Winston to accept his

function and express satisfaction. For individuals in this group, lack of job security is not a negative influence on their work or identity. As Winston puts it: "Don't know [what I am doing next quarter], but if they have something, I can take it. If they don't, that's fine. I'll find something else to do." Chris and Kathy exemplify the third form of agency. Chris's personal convictions and Kathy's multiple self-definitions enable them to choose their part-time roles without projecting an aspiration for more or other.

The fourth form of agency is applicable to all part-timers in this investigation. They view themselves as relatively autonomous both in the classroom and in their interactions with their students. Their engagement with students in the present is not conditional upon their employment status, their recollections of the past, or their imagined futures.

The constructions and meanings of academic work, or professional identity, for part-time faculty in public colleges and universities are contingent upon their positionality within their institutions—their socio-cultural contexts. Some experience subordination and institutional marginalization in their relationship to full-time faculty roles—roles they do not possess. Others experience professional value and personal worth in their relationship with students, largely in a teaching capacity. And still others have both experiences; on the one hand, they feel subordinated and demeaned; on the other, they feel validated and praised. They experience, in other words, a divided identity.

This investigation supports in part previous findings insofar as they deal with the use of non-tenure-track faculty as an organizational strategy to respond to demands for flexibility and financial adaptation (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). Yet these studies discuss the heterogeneity and institutional contributions of part-timers and full-time nontenure-track faculty, as well as the stigmas attached to their role (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001; Shaker, 2008; Waltman & August, 2007). In contrast, our study addresses the specific ways in which part-timers make sense of their social position in academic structures and articulate their professional role.

The scholarly literature addresses administrators' perceptions of non-tenure-track faculty in higher education and their benefits to colleges and universities (e.g., Cross & Goldenberg, 2009); however, such studies explore only in a minor way the perspectives of part-timers themselves about their position in the organizational structure. Our study adds to this body of literature by using an interpretative approach that examines the ways in which part-timers enact their agency by communicating who they are and by making sense of their interactional patterns, practices, and professional identity dilemmas.

Similar to previous studies, we suggest that higher education institutions, particularly through the actions of academic administrators and full-time tenure-track faculty, need to reflect on how part-timers' detachment from

institutional life and dynamics influences their performance and productivity as instructors and members of the academic profession. Although the role of part-timers in teaching is central, service activities may be a promising avenue for both their contributions and institutional integration. Institutions that bar part-timers from participation in governance, for example, may want to reconsider restrictions or modify them, and enable the establishment of a coherent professional community.

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